

30-SOMETHING WORKING GROUP

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MEEK) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Once again it is an honor to address the House. The 30-Something Working Group is back again to share with the Members what we have been working on the last week and not only coming up with new ideas for America but making sure that we package the ideas that are clogged up in this process here from moving onto the statute books of the United States laws to allow Americans to live a better life and to also put forth policy that will benefit those that are overseas fighting on behalf of this country and what we have asked them to do.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, we have talked a lot about fiscal responsibility. We have talked a lot about the lack of health care in the United States of America. We feel we have proposals that are on the table, ready to be considered if the Republican majority would allow it to be considered. Unfortunately, that has not happened. There has been a lot of discussion on the floor about Iraq, but there has also been a plan that was unveiled in the last few days to share not only with the American people but with the full House that if we can't work together in passing legislation in a bipartisan way that is going to help all Americans, not just Republicans, not just Democrats, not just independents, not just individuals that are wealthy, not just individuals that are poor, not just individuals that are making a way out of no way, to help all Americans so that we can move forth and we can find ourselves in a better situation than what we are in now, then we are willing to take the mantle and to have an opportunity to be the majority in this House.

We have the will and the desire to lead in the areas that we need to lead in. And we have this plan on housedemocrats.gov on the Internet for individuals to go on and take a look at what we are talking about as House Democrats.

When we have the opportunity to put forth this plan, if the American people see fit that that should happen, which I believe they will, hopefully they will, because the situation that we are in right now is dismal and presents a very, very challenging future for our children and for our grandchildren, because so many issues are facing this country in unprecedented ways. I think it is important that you take a good look at that. That's housedemocrats.gov.

In that plan which was unveiled by Leader PELOSI and other Democratic leaders in the Democratic Caucus this week, we talked about making health care more affordable for Americans. This is a major issue, Mr. Speaker, not

only for individuals that work on jobs, work for individuals but individuals that are providing jobs. They cannot continue to take on this health care burden without a true plan, a true leadership from the Federal Government. States can't do it alone. Local communities can't do it alone. We are going to have to do it in a way that is going to benefit the people and not the special interests. I think where we are right now, Mr. Speaker, is that the majority here in this House has benefited the special interests as it relates to health care. I think the American people and small business men and women are yearning for some leadership right now.

Also, when we look at lower gas prices to achieve energy independence, this is something that is very, very important. We have pieces of legislation out there that promotes alternative fuels, to see more of E85 so that we can have flex vehicles that are out there, and it is a part of our innovation plan. Again, going on housedemocrats.gov, you can download this information, share it with your friends, with your family, and other Members can take it to their staffs and say, we want to implement this. But, of course, that is not going to happen under the Republican-controlled House of Representatives because I don't think the will and the desire is there to really have true innovation in alternative fuels.

The other thing I want to point out, Mr. Speaker, and I think it is important, a part of our innovation plan that is also endorsed in comments by CEOs in this country, not just Democratic CEOs, independents, individuals who just lost faith in voting that are a part of major companies that are saying that the House Democratic plan, which will hopefully be a bipartisan plan once we are able to take control of this House with the help of the American people because of what is not happening here on behalf of the American people in innovation, they want us to be first in mathematics and science; they want us to be first as it relates to broadband access throughout this country; and they want us to be first in taking the lead and making sure that we push for energy independence in 10 years and develop that and make sure that we promote that through our legislation and through our appropriation. Not just giving dollars to the oil companies and saying, go ahead, we trust you, you do what you wish to do with the taxpayers' money while you continue to make record profits on the backs of the American people and we pay higher gas prices, and we are stuck in neutral with the engine running as it relates to true innovation.

I am not finished with our rollout, but I just want to point this out since I am mentioning profits. As you know, Mr. Speaker, I have read an article time after time again about the secret meeting at the White House in 2001 of the energy task force, that we know now that that task force meeting has

worked in the best way for the oil companies and in the worst way for the American people.

Again, I am not a Member of Congress with a conspiracy theory, but I just want to say that we have third-party validators that are here. My staff just handed me this and I think it is important that I read this off: White House documents show that executives from big oil companies met with Vice President DICK CHENEY's energy task force in 2001, something long expected by environmentalists but denied as recently as last week by industry officials testifying before Congress. The document obtained this week, November of 2005, the Washington Post, shows that officials from ExxonMobil, Phillips, Shell Oil Company and BP met in the White House complex with Cheney aides who were developing national energy policy, parts of which became law and parts of which are still being debated.

I am saying that, and I just want to point this out, Mr. DELAHUNT, and I am going to flip it over to you, sir. 2002, it is not a coincidence that profits were up. Profits is not a dirty word but when you have profits and, quote-unquote, price gouging and the American people putting \$10 in their tank at a time.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. And corporate welfare.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. And corporate welfare, you can't help but put this together. \$34 billion in profits for Big Oil, 2002. 2003, \$59 billion in profits. Looks pretty good. I think that meeting was worth going to. 2004, \$84 billion. This meeting is now something that will be placed in the annals of oil industry that this should happen prior to major profits coming on.

□ 1900

Then, on 2005, \$113 billion. This will continue to climb because the Republican majority doesn't have the will nor the desire to fight on behalf of the American people as it relates to energy, and the White House has shown that it has the will and the desire to allow special interests to come into the White House, write policy, and then come to the Hill and fight for that policy so that the oil companies can see this. Meanwhile, the American people are paying more for oil and for energy.

Then the individuals from the oil company have the audacity, and I am not going to blame them, because I think it is important that we put the blame where it should be. They don't have a Congressional voting card to vote for a policy to allow these prices to go up like this or profits to go up like this. It takes Members of Congress to do that, and I must say that I am proud to announce that a number, a supermajority of Democrats voted against this philosophy of oil companies having the opportunity on the backs of the American taxpayers, having their hand in the taxpayers' pocket and then, grabbing their wallet out of the other hand, they spend their money for necessities.

We are giving the taxpayers' money out in subsidies, but at the same time the oil companies are winning both ways, at the pump and with the tax dollars that the American Congress has appropriated. That is a fact, that is not fiction, and it is sad that it is a fact.

Mr. DELAHUNT, I am sorry, sir, for having you standing by so long.

Mr. DELAHUNT. I appreciate your observations, but I would just add one other component of what is not a pretty picture. If you don't have the desire, if you don't have the political will, or if there is influence that contradicts the best interest of the consumer, that in an of itself is a recipe for disaster.

But just imagine combining that with incompetence. That is when you have a tsunami, and that is what we are seeing time and time again from this administration without any accountability from the Republican majority. Tomorrow there will be—and it is not going to be a debate, it is going to be a lot of speechifying. There will not be any give and take.

But for the first time in over 3 years since this Congress voted to invade and to authorize the administration to invade Iraq, there will be a discussion of Iraq in the war there for the first time in over 3 years. I think what that tells you is that there is no debate, there is no discourse, there is no willingness to hold the administration accountable for incompetency.

Put aside all of the other concerns that you articulated, Mr. MEEK. But there was a story today in the newspaper that just underscores what you are saying, and I think emphasizes my point regarding the competence of governing or the lack thereof.

Let me read for just a moment. You have got to bear with me. This is from my hometown newspaper, the Boston Globe, and it is today. The government doled out as much as \$1.4 billion in bogus assistance to victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, getting hoodwinked to pay for season football tickets, a tropical vacation, and even a divorce lawyer, Congressional investigators have found.

Now, let's be very clear. This was an investigation conducted by a non-partisan agency that is an adjunct to the United States Congress called the Government Accountability Office. Here is what they found.

Someone stayed in a Hawaiian hotel for 70 days with taxpayer help. These same GAO investigators went undercover to expose the ease of receiving disaster expense checks from FEMA. They provided lawmakers with a copy of a \$2,300 U.S. Treasury check for rental assistance that an undercover agent got using a bogus address. The money was paid even after FEMA learned from its inspector that the undercover applicant did not live at the address. When you don't hold people accountable, things get awful sloppy, if you don't hold Federal agencies accountable, whether it be the White House, the Department of Defense sooner or later.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. DELAHUNT. Of course.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Both of you have made one overarching point, and that is that the government is broken. The government is not working the way it was meant to work. We have no leadership in Washington, D.C., from the Republican House, to the Republican Senate, to the Republican White House, that is willing to take on the gigantic task of reforming this government.

It is nothing but status quo. It is nothing but the same old tired ideas that get recycled election cycle after election cycle, with no real solutions. Whether you are talking about energy costs, or you are talking about the war in Iraq, or you are talking about Katrina, we have a broken government and nobody in Washington, D.C., with the guts to try to fix it.

Now, when you look at our foreign policy, and it has been mentioned already here, \$8.8 billion given to Iraqi ministers by the coalition provisional authority and nobody knows where it is; \$45 billion of American taxpayer dollars spent in Iraq on reconstruction, \$96 million in cash and receipts remain unaccounted for a specific project, on and on and on. Why is it broke? Why is the American government broke? Because we are not having any success in rehabilitating the Iraqi economy.

Oil production below pre-war levels, electricity is below pre-war levels, 54 percent of Iraqi households lack access to clean water. On and on and on.

But the main line is this, that this country needs to go in a new direction. The American people are tired.

Mr. DELAHUNT. What the American people are demanding, Mr. RYAN and Mr. MEEK, is accountability. Because if there is accountability, then we will have competence in our government. But as you just indicated, whether it be Katrina, whether it be the prosecution of the war in Iraq, there has been no accountability by this Congress, none whatsoever. We are paying the price. We are paying the price in terms of our national treasure. By that, I mean our young men and women who are serving in Iraq.

We have already paid and are heading in the direction of one-half a trillion dollars for the prosecution of that war. What do we have to show for it? Well, we have generals from the Department of Defense who stood up as patriots, condemned what they saw in terms of incompetence by the civilian leadership in the Department of Defense.

I would ask one of you to quote retired Army General John Batiste on Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who had this to say on April 13.

Mr. RYAN.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. We went to war with a flawed plan that didn't account for the hard work to build the peace after we took down the regime. We also served under a Secretary of Defense who didn't understand leadership, who was abusive, who was arrogant, and who didn't build a strong team.

That is not TIM RYAN, that is not KENDRICK MEEK, that is not BILL DELAHUNT. That is a retired Army general who had action in the region.

Mr. DELAHUNT. And who served his country well, a highly decorated Army general who was sent to battle, to war, and there was never a plan crafted and designed for the peace.

Three years later, where are we? We are in Iraq, we are mired now in a sectarian battle between militias, insurgents. It has become a breeding ground for terrorism.

General Paul Eaton was responsible for the training of the Iraqi security forces in Iraq. What do we hear now? All we ever hear is that the Iraqis have to do it themselves, or we will stand down when they stand up. We will help them stand up. That was 3 years ago.

How long does it take to train a U.S. Marine or U.S. Delta Force operative or a U.S. Army Ranger, a member of the Airborne or a U.S. Army soldier or Navy? Three years? No, because the civilian leadership of this administration has been incompetent from the beginning.

This is what Paul Eaton had to say about what is happening in our Department of Defense.

Mr. MEEK.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Go ahead. Mr. RYAN is doing such an outstanding job.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. This is on Secretary Rumsfeld. He has shown incompetence operationally and tactically and is far more than anyone responsible for what has happened to our important mission in Iraq. Mr. Rumsfeld must step down. That is Paul Eaton, Army Major General's comments.

I think, Mr. DELAHUNT, this all gets back to what has been happening in this country, a refusal, an absolute refusal by this Congress to conduct the kind of oversight that is necessary. Article I, Section 1 of the United States Constitution, the founding document that really organized this country, gives the power to this Chamber.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Mr. RYAN, do you realize that it has been more than 3 years, and this is the first time tomorrow that we will have a conversation about Iraq? There should have been hearings for the past 3 years. These heroes, these American heroes should have been invited to come before the appropriate committees of jurisdiction and allowed to testify about the incompetence of the prosecution of the peace in Iraq by this administration. But, no, they have been shut out, we have been shut out, and the American people don't know what is happening.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Will you yield, Mr. DELAHUNT?

Mr. DELAHUNT. I yield to my friend.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Thank you, sir. The bottom line is that we have a Republican majority that rubber stamps everything that the administration hands to them. They can't even put the paper on the desk fast enough before they rubber stamp it. When you start

talking about the fact that by the Constitution we are supposed to carry out oversight, that is not a value of the Republican majority.

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Oversight of what? No, see, they are too busy taking care of the special interests. You would think that some Members were more concerned with trying to make sure that special interests got what they needed because we do not want to forget the K Street Project where you pay to play and you get access into this Republican majority House.

So, when you look at the rubber-stamping of what has happened here, I cannot help but have this stamp here because that is how we got here, but what is very, very unfortunate is the fact that we have ourselves in a situation, in a fiscal situation that is going to take a generation almost to recover from. We have ourselves in a situation in Iraq we do not know how many years it may take for us to recover from that, and I am using the President's words now.

We have ourselves in a situation where the White House now, Mr. Speaker, wants to invite Members over to have tea and cookies right now and trying to be nicey-nice, to say we want to hear from you now; but we have men and women caught in the crossfire and we have millions and billions of dollars that have been wasted and stolen in Iraq. I am going to say stolen because of the rubber-stamp Republican majority. Anything that the administration sends down, how can we rubber-stamp it? Matter of fact, I think the Republican majority walks around with a little mini rubber stamp in their pocket, saying oversight: this is the way you want it and how you want it.

The American people HAVE to send a very strong message to this Republican majority here in the Congress that we have three branches of government for a reason, not two branches of government that deals with legislation and policy, but three branches.

We have the judicial branch that is separate and aside, but when you look at the legislative branch we are supposed to carry out oversight. Only a couple of Members of the Republican majority actually gets that and tries to practice it, but they are in a super-minority.

And so the reason why we come to the floor is to shed light on the lack of oversight. When it was a Democratic House and a Democratic White House, there was oversight. Call Bill Clinton up and ask him. I think we know that. Republican majority, the reason why you are going to see people around here scratching and fighting and begging and trying to do anything and throwing out the sods and trying to get press releases out, because the White House is very, very concerned that they will no longer be able to send legislation to the U.S. House of Representatives and that it passes through committees that

may have a half a meeting on it and come to the floor, not allowing Democrats to do anything to improve the legislation because they are too busy rubber-stamping the process, and it will disrupt that.

It is all about power and influence, and I can tell you right now, the Republican majority has gone too far with this because that is the reason why we are in the situation we are in now, and they are known. They have to shake it and they know it and they deserve the rubber stamp because that is what they have been doing since the President has been in the White House.

I am coming to Ms. JACKSON-LEE. I just want to give you a perfect example of what happens in a rubber-stamp Congress. Exhibit A, how can you borrow, Mr. Speaker, \$1.05 trillion in 4 years? I do not even know how that can be achieved in 4 years. The Republican majority has handed President Bush, he cannot do it on his own, we have the Republican Congress right under him from 2001 to 2005, \$1.05 trillion, now here is the other kicker, that comes in, and with interest. Forty-two Presidents, 224 years, 224 years, 42 Presidents, were only able to borrow \$1.01 trillion.

Mr. Speaker, I rest my case on that. I rest my case on the fact that the Republican majority has given the Bush White House everything they wanted on the backs of the American people. The special interests got what they wanted. The billionaires got what they wanted.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Point of clarification. This is foreign money.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. This is just the foreign debt. This is countries that we have borrowed money from and now we owe them.

Now, I am going to be quiet for a minute, but I just want to make this one last point and it is going to be 30 seconds.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE, if I borrowed \$100 from you, and let us say I still have not paid you back, our relationship will change. Matter of fact, your respect for me as an individual to be able to handle my own finances will be altered. Even though we are considered friends, our relationship is forever changed.

Now, for the first time in the history of the Republic, Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the Republican majority has countries like China, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Korea, the Caribbean nations, Taiwan, Canada, Germany and the OPEC nations looking at us in a different way, in an unprecedented way. The fact that, man, how can y'all tell me what to do on foreign policy and how can y'all point your finger to me as it relates to war on terror when you cannot even handle your own finances? That is not the American people. That is the Republican rubber-stamp majority. They have allowed this President to run this country into a fiscal nightmare.

So I close with that by saying, Mr. DELAHUNT, for you to say the generals

are coming out, they are coming out because the American spirit is coming out of the chest of Americans that have put themselves in harm's way, because this administration and this Congress asked them to put themselves in harm's way.

Mr. DELAHUNT. I would like to ask a question of Representative JACKSON-LEE. If Democrats were the majority in this House, would there be a forum for General Greg Newbold, retired Marine Lieutenant General, to express his opinion before the appropriate committee of jurisdiction so that we could learn and the American people could observe what the truth was in terms of the prosecution of the war and the peace in Iraq? Would that opportunity be afforded to the American people?

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I thank you, Mr. DELAHUNT. I am honored to be here with my distinguished colleagues from Ohio and from Florida and from Massachusetts because I think you represent the embodiment of the outcry of the American people.

We are in these Chambers but we cannot hear the voice of either rage, confusion or just simply asking why; and, frankly, what you have asked is whether or not we have three distinct branches of government, the executive, the judiciary and, of course, the legislature. Absolutely.

Because if you watched this Congress in the hands of Democrats some years ago, we proceeded with the Watergate hearings. We proceeded with Koreagate and Irangate, giving the American people the opportunity to see our wounds, to see our failures and to try and correct them.

Is it not interesting that in 1991, in the first Iraq War, I understand we were not here, they debated this question for 2, 3 days, hours, so that Members, no matter whether Republican or Democrat, could speak on behalf of the American people. There were three and four resolutions. People expressed themselves passionately, and therefore, they were able at the end of the vote to hold themselves accountable and to hold, of course, the Executive accountable: At that time, President Bush I.

Here we come tomorrow, and I have heard the map that shows that we are hostage as it relates to our deficit. Tomorrow, we come with a mere 5 hours. Somebody says there is a picnic that is going on that may even break through. I think it is important to ask that question because as you list the array of generals, let me share this with you.

I do not know how we can face the American people and not give credence to men and women who have bars of bravery on their chest, some wounded, some because of their service, who had nothing to gain by going against the Commander in Chief. In fact, one said I was about to become a two-star and three-star general. I was a one-star, I walked away.

And the reason why they walked away is because one of their issues is

that the military is depleted, that we will have years of rebuilding the United States military, which will take money, and this is not only physical and tangible things, tanks, arms, clothing, but it is a human capital that will have to be rebuilt.

How many of us understand that we have depleted our battalions that are supposed to be in Kuwait? We are down to one. These are the American mothers and fathers, wives and husbands, who are looking to this government to protect their young people, their husbands, their wives, their National Guard, their Reservists, that we have depleted them.

I loved Mr. MEEK in his anecdote, but it is like you run your shoes down. You do not have a heel and you are almost walking on the ground because you have got holes in it. That is, unfortunately, the military that we all love.

So I would say to you in answer to that question, and I thank you for allowing me to share that, the ignoring of the sectarian violence, the Shiias and the Sunnis, the Kurds are holding ground somewhere else. They do not want anybody to bother them. The fact that we still have our soldiers there doing nothing but sweeping up IEDs, that is not a mission of the United States military to sweep up IEDs. I hate land mines. I hate IEDs. Their mission is to finish, and until we hold this Congress accountable to do its job of oversight, until we hold the White House accountable to do its job, until we stop being embarrassed, until we stop losing our nerve, we will not.

Mr. DELAHUNT. This majority is prepared to give this administration, this White House, this Secretary of Defense, a pass on their incompetence.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. If you will yield for one moment, you are absolutely right.

We have a picture of these distinguished gentlemen. We know that some have suffered wounds, some may have even been in Vietnam, and to say tomorrow there will be somewhat of, I want to be, if you will, dignified and within the respect of this august body, but tomorrow, we will not be giving it respect.

What we really should do is have a debate into next week and next week, and we should open the doors of our hearing rooms for these generals who have been frustrated and doing op-eds and speaking to the American people from a forum that give them sound bites. We should dignify their service to this country and bring them in for them to be heard, and I hope that we will do that.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I think the point that we are trying to make here is we know it is not easy to admit you make mistakes. It goes against your human nature. But when you are elevated to leadership positions like we have been blessed to be here and to represent our country, 700,000 people apiece, it takes courage.

It does not take courage to have oversight to chase a President's pecca-

dillos around the Oval Office. That is not courageous. Courage is trying to say we have made a colossal mistake, and instead of going down the same road even faster, try to stop, reevaluate the situation and let us find out who we need to hold accountable here, who needs to be brought in before the Congress, as you said. That is not easy. That is difficult. That is one of the most difficult things about being an American, and being an American government is that your warts are here for all the world to see. But that is better than the alternative, which is tyranny and suppression and oppression by the government.

This is a part of our process, these problems getting aired out, but at the end of the day, it is part of our greatness because we can quickly then adapt, fix the problem and move on, but when you have leadership that is afraid—

Mr. DELAHUNT. And incompetent.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio.—afraid to address the real issues today, that is the basis of incompetence, whether you are in government, whether you are in business, whether you are in coaching. Does not matter what your field is. If you do not admit you make a mistake, then you are going to have problems. If a coach goes into a game with a certain game plan, and at half-time you are down 21 points, then you change the game plan; it has not worked. Move forward, move on, make the changes necessary to move the country forward.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Tomorrow we are going to hear terms like cut-and-run and defeat.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Absolutely.

Mr. DELAHUNT. That is what we are going to hear on this floor, and I challenge that Republican majority to use those terms when it comes to these generals, to these American patriots who have served their country. Ask them if they even would ever cut and run. They have demonstrated their entire careers, but they had the courage to stand up and say this is rank incompetence.

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You are not doing right by the American soldier and by the American military and you are giving them a pass. You are letting them pass.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. How many of those generals are there? I am looking. Is it about nine or ten? Looks like it is about eight.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Every day there is a growing number.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. In your lifetime, Mr. DELAHUNT, have you ever heard of this number of generals, and I know Vietnam, I am trying to recount my history, this number of generals and sacrificing their career, offering their great history before us, willing to tell the truth to the American people?

I think this is history that we have not seen in the past; that they have

been willing to sacrifice themselves in order to tell the truth to the American people.

Mr. DELAHUNT. That is why, as Mr. MEEK so eloquently observed earlier, it is time to take the country in a new direction. And there are specific proposals out there that will take this country in a new direction. He has enumerated several of them, whether it be health care or education.

How about just plain old common sense when it comes to managing our money? One-half trillion dollars and we are still mired in Iraq, tax cuts that benefit not even the wealthy in this country but the super wealthy, and if you notice this mismanagement, this incompetence in terms of our economic and fiscal policy, it is hurting people. Has anyone observed the Dow Jones? Has anyone called their broker to find out how their 401(k) is doing? There won't be an American left other than the super rich that will be able to retire.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. If the gentleman will yield, the same type of philosophy with the war, refusing to be accountable and to address the major issues and trying to provide a lot of happy talk for the American people, it is the same with the domestic economy. President Bush says America's economy is strong and benefiting all Americans, yet at the same time, as this graph shows, college tuition is up 40 percent, gas prices are up 47 percent, health care costs are up 55 percent, and median household income down 4 percent. But the President is saying the economy is strong and benefiting all Americans. Where are you living? Not in Youngstown, Ohio; not in Niles, Ohio. Give me a break.

The challenges that the average American person faces today are enormous. The challenges are enormous, and we need to get this country out of this rut we are stuck in and move in a new direction. Let us talk about broadband access for every American, let us talk about fixing the health care crisis in the United States of America so small businesses don't have to pay as much for health care costs. They could reinvest it back into their company and maybe we could shrink the trade deficit just a bit.

We have an economy right now that is very competitive, competing with 1.3 billion citizens in China and 1 billion citizens in India. And they are focused on engineering and science and all of these other issues, yet we are making it more difficult and more costly to go to school. The number of people that have student loans now is going up and up and up, and the amount that they owe back is going up and up and up. I think the stat we used the other night, Mr. DELAHUNT, was that 8 percent of the people who have student loans owe \$40,000 a year or more, up from like 1.5 percent 10 years prior to.

We can't make it more expensive, Mr. MEEK. We need to make it more accessible. And I would be happy to yield.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. Well, I would like the Members, Mr. Speaker, to go to housedemocrats.gov, housedemocrats.gov, which has a new direction for America that the Democratic Caucus unveiled this week to let people know exactly what we are going to do.

Real security. We are going to implement all of the 9/11 recommendations to secure this country, our ports and our airports, and make sure that we have hometown and front-line security, so local law enforcement officers and law enforcement agencies don't have to rub two pennies together to make sure they can secure their communities, which are our front line here in America.

Also, we plan to bring about affordable health care along the lines of not only prescription drugs but also making sure that there is a health care system that can work for the private sector, the public sector, GM, and all of those companies that are having issues, including the Federal Government.

Good paying jobs. We will raise the minimum wage. That is not a question, that is a fact. That will happen, and it will pass this House of Representatives here when Democrats get in control of this House.

Affordable college education. We will reverse what the Republican Congress has done as relates to increasing student tuitions by \$2,000, which has gone up 57 percent at public universities and in private universities about 32 percent; and also making sure that they have tax deductions for college opportunities.

We will energize America by having flex vehicles and energy independence within 10 years. That is not something, oh, well, maybe; we are thinking about it. No, we are doing that. That is under the new direction that Mr. RYAN was talking about.

And also making sure that people can retire in a dignified way and not privatize Social Security. And that is what that is about, and it goes on and on and on. So I encourage the Members to go on housedemocrats.gov. And if individuals want to talk about a plan, you can see a plan right there.

And we have Ms. JACKSON-LEE, Mr. RYAN, and Mr. DELAHUNT, and the rest of the Members of the 30-something Working Group, the will and the desire to carry out the plan, not just talking about it. We said we had the will and the desire to balance the budget, and we balanced the budget. Period, dot.

And the other thing I just wanted to add real quick, Ms. JACKSON-LEE, it is almost like you see a cliff, okay? You see a cliff. Now, the goal is to stop before you go over the cliff, not to go half speed. Republicans are talking about cutting it in half. Cutting the deficit in half is not going to get us to where we want to be. You want to stop before you go over the cliff and they are going half speed. So eventually they are going over the cliff. I feel in a fiscal

way we have gone over the cliff, and we are saying we want to take America in a new direction.

We have the resume for action and for fiscal discipline in this country and passing policies that will help the rich, those that are middle class, the poor, and making sure that businesses can prosper in this society. We have shown it during the Clinton years. Everyone was making money, everyone had hope, and everyone knew that the Congress and the White House had the will and the desire to put forth policies that would help the American people.

I yield to Ms. JACKSON-LEE.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. I just want to make this brief point, but you have hammered it on.

What you are saying is that this Congress is going to be action oriented. We are going to act. We are going to do. We are going to not come in and busy ourselves with the special interests.

What we are going to be doing is allowing generals to come in. We are going to be talking about, if you will, a new mission in Iraq, and this funding that has now almost eliminated any resources for any other domestic need, with the \$10 billion a month we are spending in Iraq and Afghanistan. We are going to be action oriented.

And I just want to close on this point, because you have laid out not only the agenda of Democrats but our passion. Democrats are going to be focused on the needs of Americans. We are not going to be with the lights out, the doors closed, and the shutters drawn. We are going to be opening our hearing rooms and listening to educators. We are going to be listening to working men and women who are asking why they are not getting a tax cut. We are going to be listening to college students about Pell Grants.

And you know what else? In conclusion, we are going to do something that I hope we will be the champions of: The minimum wage. Because right now it is a disgrace that we are allowing Americans to make \$5.15, which is the lowest minimum wage in 50 years.

So I say to you, thank you for laying out the agenda and letting the American people know that we are going to go in here waving the flags on their behalf and the minimum wage is going to be one of our number one items to do.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I thank the gentlewoman. This is not about playing gotcha. This is not about saying hey, look, this, this, and that. This is about fixing the problems. We need the information that these generals on the ground will provide us so we can actually fix the problems. And we are going to reach across the aisle and work with the Republicans.

This is not about Democrat or Republican. This is about the United States of America. We need everybody's ideas, we need everybody's intellect, and we need all Americans to participate in this. These are complex problems. There is no liberal or conservative answer.

We are in a new realm. We are well beyond anything we could have ever fathomed with the technology, the innovation, the movement of the economy, globalization, techniques, and the whole nine yards. We are past all the old slogans: Lesser government and big government. We are past that. We are so far beyond that. But the leadership in the country needs to reflect the views of the United States of America and its citizens.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. If the gentleman will yield for just 30 seconds, I have to tell you about the committee I was in today, Mr. Speaker. I leaned over to one of my Republican colleagues, who I respect and who will go unnamed. And I said, you can do something good. Because it was one of those votes that you know Democrats vote one way and Republicans vote the other way and what have you. And I said, you can do something good by voting "yes" for this amendment. And she said, well, a million here and a million there, that adds up eventually, KENDRICK.

I said, you are telling me? I said, believe me, your caucus and your leadership have found a way to borrow as much as you can borrow, and then when you ran out of borrowing where you could domestically, you went over and borrowed \$1.05 trillion from foreign nations that some of us have questions about. So you are telling me we know how to spend? You all have broken a record. You have made history in 4 years.

So when you look at it, it is sad, Mr. Speaker, that we can come to the floor with fact and not fiction. Some folks come to the floor with rhetoric and you can see right through it: Like, what is this guy talking about here on the floor? How could he possibly say that? That is not true. But, guess what, what we are talking about is true, unfortunately, because of the bad policies.

And that is the reason why we are saying, Ms. JACKSON-LEE, that we want to head in a new direction and we want the American people, Democrat, Republican, and Independent, to know that, A, we have got the will and we have the desire to lead in that direction. And it will happen. It is not like, well, we may get around to it. We are going to do it, whether the White House wants to do it or not.

I yield to the gentleman.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. I wanted to make a point that I was going through a GAO study today, and you can get it on the GAO Web site, and it showed two scenarios. One was what happens if we continue going down the same road we are on and we make President Bush's tax cuts permanent for the top 1 percent of the people, and it plays that scenario out through the numbers; what percentage of our budget we would spend on military and this, that, and the other. And one of the issues there was the interest on the debt.

If we keep implementing the Republican proposals that have been going on

for the last 5 years for sure, rubber stamped, but much longer than that in the Congress without the check of a Democrat President where they were working together, we will be paying so much money, a higher proportion of our annual revenues to interest on the debt that it will be staggering.

The American people will wholly reject that kind of fiscal policy. Because when you are paying interest on the debt, you get no value from that.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. None.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. You are not investing in education where you have millions of students that are now college educated inventing new things, helping us with alternative energy. You have none of that. You are not investing in health care, where kids and parents are healthier and workers are more productive. You get no benefit. You are giving money to China and they are taking the interest and they are reinvesting it back into their state-owned facilities and wiping out the middle class in America.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Well, Mr. RYAN, if I might just for a moment ask you to yield. What are we doing right now in the United States Congress? We are going through the appropriations process. Every single appropriation bill that comes we are having to tell our communities back home, you can't finish not the road to nowhere but the road this community needs; you can't get rail; you can't fix Amtrak.

They are telling us that the community health clinics that we have all bought into and that have some value, the quasi-public health clinics that so many people are excited about, we can't fund them. We can't provide new monies for the Leave No Child Behind, if you ever invested in that at all. We can't provide any monies for alternative research in energy for our universities.

And we can't provide them any dollars partly because of this misdirected mission with young people dying in Iraq and not being able to refocus, and then of course the fact that this deficit has continued to grow.

□ 1945

I just want to say, reiterate once again the sadness of how many foreign nations own the United States now.

Mr. DELAHUNT. We have an ownership society.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. I didn't think we would see this. I hope the American people who are listening understand that this is serious. And we are not here trying to cast aspersions, but this is serious on behalf of the American people. I hope as Democrats take leadership on these issues, we have a chance to change lives.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. This is the problem we have. Two final points to wrap it up. Let's get back to the sense of the common good, Mr. DELAHUNT, where everybody benefits and everybody contributes.

We should demand as Democrats that every citizen in the country, able-bodied citizen, contributes to the good of the country and the economy. They get educated and everything else. We need to demand that of everybody. But at the same time those people who have benefited from the system, the economic system, the capitalistic system, democracy in the United States of America, all of these people need to contribute. The more you benefit, the more you are obligated to keep the system running. Everybody contributes and everybody benefits. Let's start focusing on the common good instead of all of these special interests.

It gets back to this, and this is one of the final points I want to make. Over the past 5 years we have figured out that we, myself personally and my constituents back at home, do not trust the judgment of the Republican leadership in the United States Congress and in the Senate and in the White House. It is not personal. They are good people, but their judgment has been very poor over the past couple of years.

And the end result is tuition costs are up 40 percent; gasoline prices up 47 percent; health care costs up 55 percent; median income is down 4 percent; and nothing with the minimum wage, lowering college tuition costs, and all of things that are going to lead, business incubators and downtown revitalization, all the things that this country needs.

Let's take this country in a new direction. I am excited about the opportunities we are going to have being in the majority in January. I think it is going to be an exciting time with new ideas and a lot of things that we can accomplish here in the United States.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Mr. Speaker, I couldn't improve on everything that has been said. I am excited about the challenges ahead. I think we are going to take this country in a new direction. I think it is going to benefit the American people, whether they be Republicans or Democrats or unenrolled.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Americans.

Mr. DELAHUNT. It's America.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. We simply want to say we are prepared to roll up our sleeves. Nothing is guaranteed. We will be working real hard. And if the Democrats achieve leadership in November, we will have the roll-up-the-sleeve attitude, the open-door attitude, the oversight attitude, and what is best for the American people.

Mr. DELAHUNT. I think that really sums it up. If Democrats take control of this House, it is going to open the doors. It is going to open the windows. We are going to get a breath of fresh air, and accountability will be in vogue once more, for the first time in a long time.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Mr. Speaker, it would be an honor for me to watch and listen to you read that with your new glasses.

Mr. DELAHUNT. This is the 30-something Working Group, www.HouseDemocrats.gov/30something.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. One more time. Read it twice.

Mr. DELAHUNT. This is Leader PELOSI's 30-something Working Group, www.HouseDemocrats.gov/30something.

Mr. RYAN of Ohio. Thank you. Good job.

Mr. MEEK of Florida. With that, Mr. Speaker, we would like to not only thank the Democratic Caucus but also thank Members of the House for allowing us to come to the floor to address the House one more time.

PEAK OIL

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. POE). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2005, the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. BARTLETT) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. BARTLETT of Maryland. Mr. Speaker, today I had a very pleasant visit with a very important person. Matt Simmons came by and we spent about an hour and a half talking. Now, who is Matt Simmons and why should we be interested in a discussion with Matt Simmons?

Matt Simmons is the President's personal energy adviser. He was the primary architect of his energy policy for his first campaign, continued with him through his second campaign. Matt Simmons is the president and CEO of one of the largest energy investment banks in the world, out of Houston, Texas, and he has written a book which I have here, "Twilight in the Desert."

I would like to read just a little bit from the dust cover of the book:

Saudi Arabia is the most important oil-producing nation in history. The secretive Saudi Government repeatedly assures the world that its oil fields are healthy beyond reproach, and that they can maintain and even increase output at will to meet the skyrocketing global demand. But what if they can't?

"Twilight in the Desert" looks behind the curtain to reveal a Saudi oil and production industry that could soon approach a serious, irreversible decline.

In this exhaustively researched book, veteran oil industry analyst Matthew Simmons draws on his own three-plus decades of insider experience and more than 200 independently produced reports about Saudi petroleum resources and production operations.

What he uncovers is a story about Saudi Arabia's troubled oil industry, not to mention its political and societal instability which differs sharply from the globally accepted Saudi version. It's a story that is provocative and disturbing, based on undeniable facts but until now never told in its entirety. "Twilight in the Desert" examines numerous aspects of Saudi Arabia and its looming oil crisis.

Mr. Speaker, we had a discussion, as I mentioned, that was about an hour and a half long. Matt Simmons shared